



'Touching'

The Theology of Touch

by Vivien Naylor



To write about the Theology of Touch is almost a contradiction in terms: it is so much about integration and relationship and being grounded in experience. But if I can share anything of the excitement and importance of this way of thinking and being, then that will be something.

We would not have a theology of touch without a theology of the body and the

glory and the scandal of our faith is its physicality:

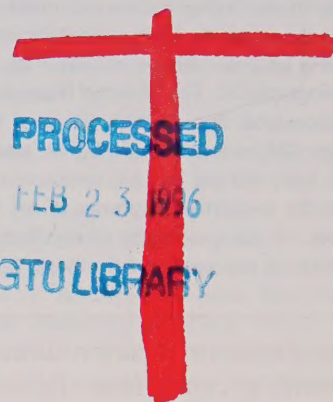
'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.'

Incarnation and Eucharist need to be firmly tied into the concrete events and images of the baby in the manger and the body on the cross. The resurrection also has a physical dimension with those wonderful post-resurrection encounters: Mary wanting to hold Jesus; Thomas needing to see and touch Jesus' wounds to enable his acclamation "My Lord and My God"; and the breaking of bread bringing recognition of Jesus.

The sharing of Jesus in our humanity, and our receiving and sharing the broken bread, bring us into bodily relationship and unity: we are one body in Christ.

Despite this foundation, there has, historically, often been a bias against the body, seeing it as impure and distracting from the spiritual, or giving prime importance to the thinking function. But our very identities are bound up with our bodies and with touch.

The foetus can touch within a month of conception. Babies touch and explore before ever they speak and the way we are touched and handled as babies affects our self-image for better or worse. Further, our identities are also bound up with God. St Augustine said in his *Confessions*: "You were there in



Body and Spirit

God creates us body and spirit, but often the two seem in opposition to each other. In this issue the writers consider different ways in which the bodily and the spiritual nourish and support each other; in touch, in lessons learnt from Zen, in women's experience and in men's, and in the life of Saint Francis. It seems a particularly appropriate theme in this season, as we remember that God took our flesh and lived our bodily life.

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front of me all the time but I had wandered far away from myself and if I could not find my own self, how much less could I find you." To discover who I am and who God is is part of the same process, and who I am is bound up with my body.

The body is not often thought of as a source of enlightenment but it is precisely that. Therapists have shown how emotions, attitudes and memories are stored more deeply in our bodies than in our minds and, unlike the mind, the body cannot dissemble. Rabbi Lionel Blue recalls in his autobiographical *Backdoor to Heaven* how he discovered this through his own body therapy: "My mind could lie, but the tensions in my body did not lie. My soul could play tricks; the instinctive responses of my body did not. In the geography of my flesh was the plan of my past and the hope for my future."

The foetus can touch within a month of conception. Babies touch and explore before ever they speak and the way we are touched and handled as babies affects our self-image, for better or worse.

James Nelson (in *Embodiment*) maintains that there is a two-way question: we need to ask what our bodies and sexuality say about God, how they inform our faith, as much as what faith may tell us about our bodies. Our own experience is very precious and makes our faith and spirituality authentic, reality based and integrating.

All this is stating what holistic medicine and much ancient wisdom affirm, that we are integrated unities of body, mind and spirit. As Christians, we can thus also speak in terms of body as sacrament: the outward and physical sign of inward and spiritual truth and grace. Popular parlance talks of "body language" and God's most powerful statements about himself are made in silence through the body of Jesus: the baby, the cross, the bread and wine. As a priestly people, we are called to be a sacramental presence in the world: God continues to incarnate himself in us and continues to dwell with his people.

It follows that, when we touch someone, it is not just a physical event of flesh meeting flesh but a language for our very beings, a sacrament. Two peoples' histories and hopes meet. But how do they meet? How do we touch other peoples' lives? In many sacramental acts in the liturgical life of the church, God touches our lives in power and intimacy: to baptise, to bless, to commission, to heal. Do we touch to mediate God in Christ?

Jesus came to be the servant of all and to give his life as a ransom for many. In St John's Gospel, instead of the Last Supper, we see Jesus washing his disciples' feet. Do we wash one another's feet? If we take someone else seriously, we are bound to take

their physical nature and needs seriously.

As Eric James said in a talk, you cannot baptise a baby and send it back to a slum without doing something about housing.

We are integrated units of body, mind and spirit. As Christians, we can thus speak in terms of body as sacrament: the outward and physical sign of an inward and spiritual truth and grace.

Touch, in an ordinary and practical action, can be the language of service and gift and of liberation and redemption.

Jesus said at the foot washing: "If I do not wash your feet, you are not in fellowship with me." (John 13:8) This shows us two further lessons about touch. Firstly, that touch expresses and effects unity and communion. Skin is physically our container and boundary but through its abundant endowment with sensory nerve cells, it also dissolves boundaries. Touch is a reciprocal sense: we cannot touch without being touched. The marriage service (from Genesis 2:24) speaks of two becoming one flesh. When a nurse cares for a patient, however "difficult" or unattractive, a bond grows between them.

Secondly, touch is the language of humility. Peter had to learn to receive. Do we let God wash our feet? And in our reaching out to others, we show we are not self-sufficient. Do we dare to share our brokenness with each other as God shares his with us?

If touch is the means to and language for gift and communion, it is, of course, also the language for love and joy. Our encounters with those we love are full of joyful expression through touch. Further, to be embodied is to be sexual and it is one and the same energy that pervades our sexuality and our spirituality and both affect all we are and do. Jim Cotter, in *Pleasure, Pain and Passion*, parallels making love and making Eucharist, and also says: "A sacramental understanding of sexuality perceives it as more than incidental or physical. It recognises that the sexual participates in the spiritual, is an intrinsic element in any impulse of embodied human beings towards God . . . The prayer that we may dwell in Christ and Christ in us includes the dimension of the sexual."

However, the question must arise as to how we learn to touch appropriately. Space invaders are hard to bear! I would suggest three related ways.

Firstly, there is an essential relationship between space and solitude, between touch and relationship. We move between the two poles of touching and not touching, holding and letting go, attachment and detachment. We do not possess, nor are we possessed by, God or any one else. We need to be comfortable with our own and each other's space so we can enter another's space with respect. Jim Cotter says: "Always one will

affect the other - the art of touch is not unaffected by the art of solitude, nor the quality of solitude unaffected by the quality of touch" (*ibid*). Jesus went apart to pray and his ministry was full of touch.

Secondly, prayer is one form, and for the Christian an essential form, of solitude. There is a parallel between prayer and touch for both are a kind of listening, a being open to the other, an attempt of the ego towards humility. When we touch, we touch with ears in our hands. When we pray, not only do we become more in touch with our true self and with God but also with others. In prayer we grow in love but it is the paradoxical love of caring and not caring, so that we do not give or touch out of our own need.

Thirdly and lastly, the body in prayer and, more specifically, breathing, can teach us better how to touch. So often we live cut off from our true selves and feelings. We are distracted by so many external stimuli as well as our inner noise of hopes and fears and arguings, trying so hard to understand with our minds Life, God and the Universe. Relaxed breathing helps to bring us back into ourselves, out of our heads, so that we can be fully present, here and now, more fully alive and more aware. Anthony de Mello is very helpful in his book *Sadhana* on the use of the body and breathing in prayer and awareness and gives much practical guidance. He says: "When you pray with your body you give power and body to your prayer . . . God is the ground of my being . . . and I cannot go deep into myself without coming in touch with him. The awareness of self is also a means for developing awareness of the other."

Thus breathing, embodiment, prayer, solitude and touch are interdependent and mutually enhancing. And so we come full circle: to find ourselves is to find God, to be fully embodied is to re-incarnate the Word for the world and touch the world with Christ's body.



Vivien Naylor read classics at Cambridge then became a hospice nurse and massage therapist.

She is now a priest and has just become Assistant Chaplain at the Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust.

Saint Francis and Brother Ass

by Brother Angelo SSF



There is a sense in which any consideration of Francis' asceticism, that is, his attitude towards 'Brother Ass' as he called his body, must begin with the saint's primary and all-embracing concern for poverty. Chastity was a poverty of comfort, companionship, solace etc; and obedience a poverty of will or self-glory. Also, we must be aware that 'body', in Francis' writings, encompassed everything we want for ourselves, and undertake because of love of self rather than love of God and our fellow human beings.

All this was the basis of a life aimed at total spiritual transformation, and the threefold vow enabling one to be open to God, humble before God, and ready to be used by God could therefore only be kept through abstinence, discipline and self-mortification at various levels.

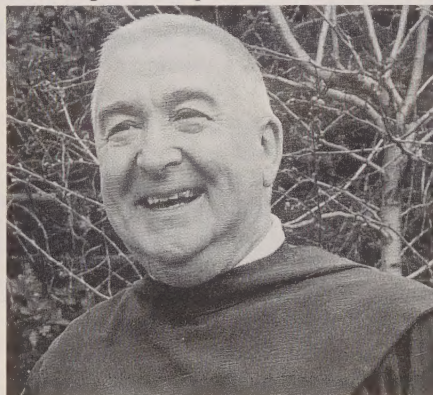
For Francis the life of the 'poor man' must be an habitual reference to God, and such a life then really has no limits because its dimensions are the dimensions of God. We know from experience that mind, body and spirit are intimately related and interactive, each having effect on the other. Francis realised that only physical, visible poverty could produce the truly 'poor in spirit', total chastity lead to loving surrender to God, and strict obedience evolve into humble union with the will of God.

All three, voluntarily undertaken, expressed the willingness to make one's self insecure and vulnerable to the same suffering and hardship endured and experienced involuntarily by the marginalised persons of society. But the original brothers and sisters were not a collection of individuals, demonstrating separate feats of ascetic self-denial, but a community seeking to be faithful to a call to live on those margins and intent on helping one another to remain faithful to that difficult mission.

Though Francis seems not to have approved of the extremes of self-mortification as practised by the Albigenses, Waldenses and other sects of the period, on occasion he personally appeared to go 'over the top'. One writer suggests Christ was overstating the case to make his point, when blasting the fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season (Mark 11. 12-14 & 20-21)!

The stories are many. When experiencing intense physical temptation on one occasion, Francis first beat himself very severely with his cord saying, "See, brother Ass . . . thus it is becoming for you to bear the whip." However, when the scourging did not have the desired effect he 'went out into the garden and cast himself naked into a deep

pile of snow.' His flesh was very spare. He wore rough garments, he slept very briefly; so he is described by Thomas of Celano. Even his usual spartan life was not sufficient for him at such times as Lent. One year, Francis spent Lent on an island near Perugia, (Trasimeno?) starting on Ash Wednesday. When collected by a friend on Maundy Thursday he still had one and a half loaves left. The half loaf he had eaten had been out of respect for Christ who, during his forty-day fast, had eaten no bodily food at all. Francis's fast had been in order to 'cast the venom of vainglory from him, while following the example of Christ.'



Brother Angelo SSF

At one point in his life he had just recovered from quartan fever, a very grave illness with recurring high temperatures, and during which he had eaten hardly anything; he nevertheless felt he had been self-indulgent. He had just preached a sermon to a particular group of people and immediately afterwards ordered Brother Peter Catanii, who was later to become the first Minister General of the Order, to lead him naked, and by a rope around his neck, before the very folk to whom he had preached. Francis then said, "You, and all who have followed me in renouncing the world, believe me to be a holy man. But I confess that during my illness I have eaten meat, and stew flavoured with meat." Those who heard him wept, and

said, "We know that this saint leads a holy life, for he has reduced his body to the likeness of a living corpse by his abstinence and austerity ever since his conversion to Christ."

When it was bitterly cold and his Guardian wanted to sew a small piece of fox fur under his habit as protection for his weak stomach and spleen, Francis responded by demanding fur on the outside also "so that everyone may know that I am wearing it underneath as well." So he had it made in this way; but although it was very necessary to him, he seldom wore it.

Late in his life, and around the time of the Stigmata, Francis confessed to one of the brethren that he had an uneasy conscience about his care of the body, still afraid of indulging it too much in times of illness, anxious that he should not come to its aid by means of delicacies or extra food. The brother responded by asking Francis how obedient had his body been through the years and the saint admitted that it 'was obedient in all things' sparing itself nothing, rushing almost headlong to obey; shirking no labour and refusing no discomfort. "In this", added Francis, "I and it agreed perfectly that we would serve the Lord Christ without any reluctance"; which drew from his brother the question, "Where then is your generosity? Is this a worthy way to repay faithful friends, to accept a kindness willingly, but when the giver is in need not to repay him as he deserves?" Francis' reaction was to apologise. "Rejoice, brother body, and forgive me, for behold, I now gladly fulfil your desires, I hasten to give heed to your complaints." Unfortunately, as in many cases of regret or repentance, it came too late. How could his exhausted body rejoice now? What could support what had collapsed?

So we learn that, although encouraging a degree of austerity in the Order, Francis did learn a lesson about exaggeration; that self-denial should be tempered by discretion and include compassion. An illustration of this is the story of the friar who had fasted too long and was unable to sleep for hunger. Francis 'put some bread before him and advised him gently to eat it, and began to eat himself first, to avoid embarrassing him.' The brother 'was overjoyed as seeing the saint's exquisite tact which enabled him to relieve his material needs and gave him such a wonderful example.'

This story is not primarily concerned with food, but with self-denial balanced by charity, prudence and a proper respect for one's being. Each one of us should take into consideration our own constitutions, not to over-indulge but not to overdo penance either: discipline is not deprivation and any extreme can too easily lead to pride and coldness towards others. Right and proper asceticism is a part of the way that 'slows us down and leads us into that quiet centre within, where God speaks softly the truth of our own worth. It is the way of prudence and charity towards ourselves as well as others.'

Zen Body, Zen Mind

by Tom Chetwynd



There is an impressive Christian tradition of hard spiritual training for the sake of attaining spiritual excellence: the ascetic tradition of prayer that is little practised at present, and not even much favoured. It involved strenuous physical exertion, as well as mental effort: sleepless nights of vigil followed by days spent in prayer. One of the fathers of the desert meditated close to the wall so that if he nodded off he banged his head on a stone.

It was a tradition which required craft and skill as well as hard effort. That is the law of the universe: whatever you do, whether farming, carpentry or gardening, it requires skill and effort to get results. For the Desert Fathers, the Orthodox monks, and other Christians who followed the same path in the West, the life of prayer required comparable skills and exertion.

Long before I started practising zen, I once had the thought that if only Christians worked at their prayer from 9am to 5pm, as others work in factories and offices, they might get somewhere with it: on my first zen retreat I was reminded of this thought - because we were expected to meditate from 5am to 9pm (with breaks for tea and meals, as in the factories, of course).

This is the sport of sports: the match is against your own ego and it is to the death.

But for the Christian hermits and monks of old, Christian prayer could involve standing with arms raised as the sun set behind you, and never budging till the sun rose in front of you - even though a viper climbed up your leg. Such were the stories gathered to inspire the next spiritual generation in their efforts to keep still and stay awake. And alongside the physical struggle, was the fierce inner battle against wandering thoughts and the vagrant imagination. This was sometimes called pure wordless prayer, or more usually contemplative prayer, and was respected as the highest and most difficult form of prayer. The aim was to attain a pure shining mind, that perfectly reflected the Divine reality - just as water when it settles and clears reflects the heavens.

From the teaching of Our Lord Jesus Christ and down through many spiritual generations of hermits and monks, it was the one way to experience the Kingdom of God. Be alert, as if a thief were about to break in, bang persistently till you break through; at the time of night when thieves go out to steal gold, go yourself and steal the Kingdom of Heaven. And even the ordinary Christian joined in the work of contemplatives,

especially during Passiontide, and was exhorted (in the Penny Catechism) to raise the mind and heart to God. But how? It is this form of Christian prayer that most closely resembles Eastern meditation, and zen in particular.

Zen is surprisingly strenuous and physical - rather like training for sport. "Have a nice relaxing time", people sometimes say as you go off on a zen retreat, and you know immediately that they have never tried it, even for half an hour. Watching somebody sitting cross-legged, facing the wall, you might not get that impression. Yet on my first zen retreat, which lasted seven days, I lost a stone in weight.

So what is so strenuous about it? The point is that the human body does not like keeping absolutely still, without budging an eyelash, not just for half an hour at a time, but one half hour after another, day after day. All the time, the body keeps wanting to move, to shift position - just a little - to stretch or to scratch. To keep it still, for long periods of time, is very hard - hard training. It reminded me immediately of hours spent in childhood training for sport, with the sweat pouring off me at times again, as it had then.

When the body is restrained from moving it sends out signals of pain. You try to reassure it that normally you would move, you have understood, but just this once it must remain absolutely still. Please. But the signals only grow more urgent. And the long wrestling match has begun. This is the sport of sports: the match is against your own ego and it is to the death.

Cease All Thinking

When the body is constrained from moving, at least the mind wants to think: but you have to cut off all thoughts. 'Cease all thinking' as Abbot John Chapman put it in his *Simple Rules for Contemplative Prayer*. When the human mind can't think, it resorts to dreaming - but you have to turn your attention away from the inner TV set too.

After the pain comes the numbness: the legs go dead. It doesn't do any harm so long as you take care getting up: make sure you have

control over all your toes before you risk standing up.

Then back down for another half hour struggle with your own stubborn Ego. Still and silent as death, with the breath so calm and narrow it is barely perceptible. For a Christian, this is the ultimate form of self-

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It is hard work but effective . . .
Zen becomes second nature, a
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denial, dying daily with Christ.

The ego hates the work and puts up all kinds of clever objections. But there is another part of ourselves which exults when doing zen. It seems and feels most unnatural at first, but in time it becomes second nature: a very natural communication with life itself. After the initial phase of determined hard discipline, the work grows easy. It becomes easier and easier to attain that state of effortless concentration that is required for true meditation. Of course there are still good days and bad days - just as a Wimbledon player may serve ace after ace - or a string of double faults.

Zen is a matter of position, breathing and concentration. With regard to the position, it is the stillness that is most important. There is no deep prolonged contemplative prayer without this stillness: both Teresa of Avila and Padre Pio were absolutely still when they prayed. The stilled mind may immobilise the body - or the other way round. Each contributes to the stillness of the other. But of the two the mind is harder to control, so zen starts with the body. And in keeping still, don't underestimate the value of a good solid position.

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For this, there is nothing more solid than the cross-legged lotus position with the knees and bottom firmly on the mat and cushion: the point is a good solid base, like a tripod holding a camera. The good base supports the spine, which needs to be straight and stretched. If the spine is absolutely straight, you don't waste any energy supporting it. It is like an arrow to heaven - a physical prayer. It is also stretched a little which helps to stretch and calm the breath.

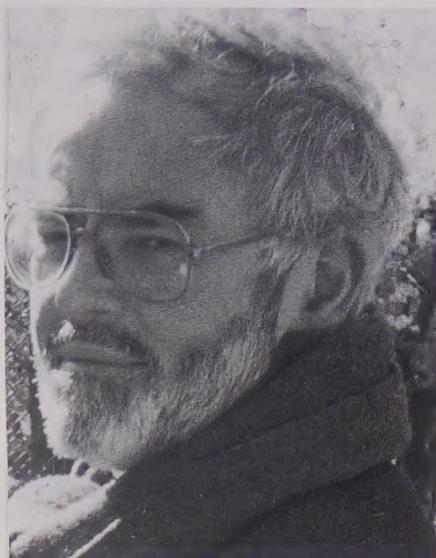
With the eyes you look straight ahead and then drop the lids, so that they are three-quarters shut: there is a soft light and the vision is diffused through it. In this way you are not distracted by anything around you, nor by the even greater distractions within. You are as if on a tightrope between the inner and outer worlds - which is just where you want to be. Also, it diminishes the danger of nodding off to sleep if you shut your eyes. The breath is long calm and narrow, controlled (very slightly) by the muscles below the navel. After half an hour of zen the breath has normally calmed down from about twelve breaths to the minute to two - but of course people vary.

The position and the breathing help enormously with the concentration. You try to get your mind to sink down into the lower belly which does not think or day-dream: it just is. It is the centre of your body, and the centre of your life, your being. Our Lord Jesus Christ may have been referring to this important centre of our being when he said, "From your bellies will flow fountains of living water."

Zen is not a doddle. It is hard work but effective. It is certainly not more difficult than learning to play golf or tennis, and does not require any particular aptitude. But it is more serious, and the prize is incomparably greater - nor does it conflict with anybody else's prize.

Let us hope that Christians will turn back to recover their own great tradition of spiritual training - helped by the Zen Masters; living

teachers of meditation, mostly Buddhist, but some Christian.



Tom Chetwynd was educated by the Benedictine monks at Downside and the Jesuits at Heythrop College, London University. He is a writer, mainly on psychology (Jungian) and religion. Alongside his Christian practice he has practised zen for twenty years. His present teacher is Sister Elainé MacInnes, of Our Lady's Missionaries, who spent 35 years in the Far East learning, and then teaching, Zen. She is now director of the Prison Phoenix Trust in Oxford, where she also has a zen centre.

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Saint Francis' Eye Trouble

by David W Hill



During a Franciscan pilgrimage to Assisi in July, led by the Revd David Faulks, we visited a number of shrines in the region of Rieti associated with the treatment of St Francis' painful and blinding eye disease. So it was natural that a discussion of this aspect of his life should emerge. Being a retired eye surgeon, my opinion was sought and, as a result I looked into the literature, using the Sisters' library in Assisi and on my return to London the Wellcome Library of the History of Medicine. From these very brief researches I have tried to put together a short account of the illness which so sorely tried Brother Francis.

In 1220 Francis visited the Crusaders in Acre and included the Holy Land in his itinerary, returning to Italy the same year: in his travels he had also visited Egypt. His eye condition was generally thought to date from these visits. Perhaps the most likely cause of his illness was trachoma, an infectious disease of the outer eye, endemic in the Middle East and hot countries for centuries, in areas where hygiene falls short of modern standards. At first affecting the membranes covering the inside of the lids and surface of the eye, it leads to discomfort, watering of the eye, and sensitivity to light. Later stages lead to scarring of the inner surface of the lids with inturning of the lashes, so that the lashes rub against the surface of the globe, and particularly the cornea, the clear window through which light enters the eye; this complication increases the watering and pain. At the same time the ingrowth of blood vessels and scar tissue into the cornea clouds and distorts vision, leading eventually to virtual blindness.

Understandably, the contemporary accounts of St Francis' life describe only the later

stages of his eye affliction, when it became a significant hindrance to his life style. He was in considerable pain at nights and received the attention of the brothers; he assured them that in this good work they would be repaid by the Lord, and given credit for the good works which they might otherwise have been doing. St Francis was very loath to be concerned for himself, and resisted the advice of the Bishop of Ostia, Cardinal Ugolino, that he should seek treatment for his eye condition. In the spring of 1225, following the receipt of the Stigmata the previous autumn, he was at San Damiano in great pain, and was persuaded by Brother Elias, now Vicar General, to receive treatment; unfortunately this was ineffective. In the summer of the same year, after receiving a letter from Cardinal Ugolino, Francis travelled to Rieti and thence to Fonte Colombo, where he received treatment on the recommendation of the Cardinal. It is recorded that he travelled on a horse, his head covered in a large hood with a woollen and linen bandage over his eyes to protect them from the light. Once again the treatment, of an heroic nature, failed to bring relief. Later in the year, he received treatment at La Foresta (San Fabiano); during the visit his prayers miraculously restored the crops of the poor priest, trampled by his numerous visitors. Again in the following spring, 1226, the year of his death, he was treated in Siena.

One of the strange concepts that held sway in Francis' time was the idea that excessive weeping could lead to blindness; when advised to restrain his tears, Francis preferred, 'purifying his spiritual vision with floods of tears, and thought nothing of the fact that it was costing him his sight.' There seems, in terms of modern medicine, to be no rational explanation for this idea; perhaps the truth lies in a confusion of thought between the cause and the accompanying effects of some forms of eye disease. At that

time the source of tear formation was hotly debated; prolonged non-emotive weeping was thought by many to come from a disorder of the phlegm, itself derived from water, one of the four elements of the body, according to Aristotle. This disordered phlegm, proceeding from the brain, might take the form of tears affecting the eyes.

Equally strange to the modern mind was the apparently barbarous treatment suffered by Francis on the advice of his doctor, cautery of the temple from the ear to the eyebrow. At first hesitant to receive treatment, Francis blessed "Brother Fire" and asked him to deal kindly with him, then submitted willingly to the treatment and felt no pain. The rationale for this treatment, based on the principles noted in the previous paragraph, was to stem the fluid which for years had accumulated day and night in the eyes, achieving this end by cauterising the veins in the temple. Presumably this was thought to be the route by which the excessive disordered phlegm reached the eyes, causing the disease. Benevenuto Grassus, a highly-respected oculist of about Francis' time, in his treatise *De Oculis* gives a full, but to the modern mind a somewhat confused, description of diseases of the external eye; citing for some forms of disease a similar causative rationale, and recommending the use of the cautery as a late treatment when local applications to the eyes had failed.

Fashions change and, doubtless in another century, modern concepts of eye disease and its treatment will seem hopelessly outdated: however, we cannot fail to regret that modern effective methods of treatment of the trachoma infection and its complications were not available to Francis, sparing him pain and preserving vision. Through all his suffering his fortitude and humility remain for us a shining example.

Theme Prayer

Loving Word of God,
you have shown us
the fullness of your glory
in taking human flesh.
Fill us, in our bodily life,
with your grace and truth
that our pleasure
may be boundless
and our integrity complete,
in your name.
Amen.

Janet Morley



Minister's Letter

Sister Nan, Minister Provincial of the European Province of CSF, writes:



going home ultimately. Our Brother Paul, an American, before he died used to say "My bags are packed and ready and I'm on the platform waiting for the train to take me home." May your home be a place of welcome and blessing and, as we start a new year, may God continue to bless you.

With much love,

NanCSF.

frequently, I realise that I have lots of homes and also that I'm never quite settled. It is a strange feeling. But I think that when I feel a sense of belonging and acceptance, a generosity towards myself and a sense of respect towards myself (not that these are usually that clearly articulated!) then I'm at home in whichever place I happen to be. Then I feel at home inside, and can recognise that that is what is happening inside. Becoming the community, and indeed the person, God intends us to be takes place in the environment of love which is generous, respectful and non-exclusive. For me, this describes home at its best. I can't help thinking about us being the temple of God which is holy, 'and that temple you are'. You are the place God chooses to make home in. God also calls us to share that home and, in the end, God will meet us and bring us home with tender love and joy. So all our experiences of home, staying home, being at home are, in a sense, practising for

Imprisoned Splendour

by Brother Colin Wilfred



Andy sat on the sofa lovingly cradling the new born baby of some friends of his, a powerful picture of our bodily beginning and ending almost too poignant to recall even now. He had been a very handsome young man, but was now disfigured with Karposi's sarcoma (a form of skin cancer symptomatic of AIDS), but his love, gentleness and delight were undimmed and remained so until his death a few months later.

call God and by whom we judge what it is to be human.

"All that matters in the end is unconditional love" was often said by my friend Peter, the first person I ever met with HIV some ten years ago. I have seen no reason over the last decade to revise that opinion. I am well aware that we all fall short of that ideal yet I continue to be suspicious of those individuals and groups in society and church who say "Ah yes, but ..."

But HIV and AIDS is not just about sickness and dying, it is also about living and celebrating, perhaps put into sharper focus by the fact of diagnosis. Mike, who died recently, once told me that as he listened in turmoil to the health adviser telling him he had an HIV positive diagnosis, he heard Jesus saying to him personally, "This is my body", and in that traumatic moment he was assured of God's love - an assurance that never left him.

In Kazantsakis' novel about Saint Francis *God's Pauper*, in the story of Francis' encounter with the untouchable of his time, the leper, Francis says to his companion, "There will be lepers on every road." Why should we think that our time and place should be any different? In some ancient versions of the story, the leper vanishes and Francis realises that he has kissed the Body of Christ - the trouble is that you can't know the living Christ until you have embraced him in the body.

... to know
rather consists in opening out a way
whence the imprisoned splendour
may escape
than in effecting entry for a light
supposed to be without.

Robert Browning

our power games, whether it be through war, economic exploitation, despoiling the creation or in sexual relationships.

In living and working amongst those of us who are living with or affected by HIV and AIDS, I feel I have come closer to the Jesus who chose to be with the outsiders, the unwanted, the unclean of his church and society. Often for Jesus that 'being with' was a matter of bodily contact and that human touch manifested the power of God to heal. It enabled men and women to know that they are loved and accepted both for what they are and what they might become. He brought both the message and actuality of freedom into their lives and his own suffering and death spells out in bodily form that total identification which brings new life and unimaginable freedom.

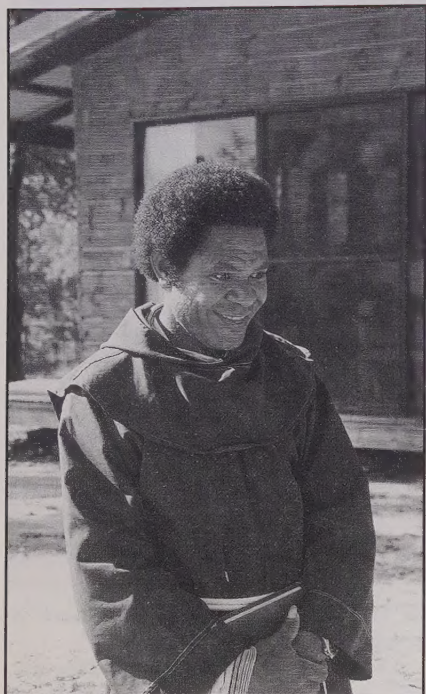
To sit beside the bed of someone fighting for breath in a grotesquely emaciated body filled with endless infections, with mother holding one hand and the partner the other and friends embracing the feet, inevitably has gospel echoes. In the person and crucifixion of Christ we see the ultimate example of Human Immune Deficiency made incarnate in the flesh of him whom we

The Episcopalian bishop of California, Bill Swing, once said to his clergy, "don't come to me with your problems about AIDS until you can say that you have looked into the face of a person with AIDS and seen the face of Christ." As I know from the reaction of some readers of this magazine and elsewhere, some Christians find that discovery difficult to make.

People living with HIV and AIDS, men, women and children in their millions across the face of the earth, are not primarily a virus or a disease. They are certainly not just a blameworthy means whereby that virus has been transmitted. They are primarily human persons, physical bodies, embodiments of God's image and likeness, dwelling places of the Spirit.

Someone once said to me "HIV and AIDS is the disease of the unloved" and certainly its heartlands have been amongst the unloved communities of this world; the black, the poor, the gay, the drug user, those in prostitution and so on. In many parts of the world it is the man who has infected his female partner because so often women have no power over their own bodies in a male-dominated society where we men play out

The Papua New Guinea



Brother Timothy Joseph, Deputy Minister
of the PNG Region



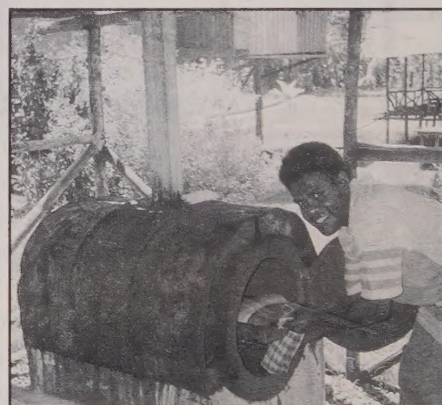
Katie and the children, Matthew, Ronald, Philip, Moses & Mishael welcoming all



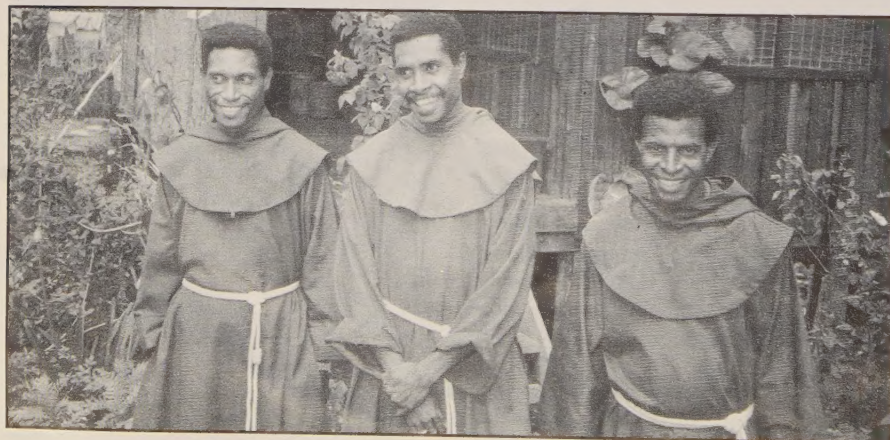
Brothers bearing Francis aloft!



Monvis Helo kneads bread . . .



We all need well-baked bread



Gerry Ross, George Alfred and Lawrence at Goroka



Ananias Korina & Sr Beverly CV

a Region - At Home

Celebrating Francis

Along the road that runs out of Popondetta, towards the shores of Oro Bay, in Papua New Guinea, is a bush track. Had you been here, you might have seen, over several days, men and women, young and old, making their way along it. Pots on their heads, bilums slung over their shoulders, or gigantic-sized plastic bags or sacks of rice being carried aloft on many heads. You would have followed them down the track past the homes of the Melanesian Brotherhood and between the cocoa trees and the oil palm plantation, to find a traditional arch of welcome made out of palm fronds intertwined with flowers and coloured leaves, and a little further on a sign over the pathway proclaiming:

ORO, ORO, ORO - thrice welcome!

You would know that you had then arrived at the Franciscan brothers celebrating the feast of the Stigmata of St Francis. Along with hundreds of others, the community at St Mary of the Angels Friary would welcome you, the Archbishop and village children, all brothers and sisters in Christ.

Banners depicting St Francis and St Clare were being carried, led by Sing Sing groups and followed by yet more children. It all began at dawn with the *Angelus* and it will end with entertainments, dancing, dramas and eating up the food that everyone brought to share - it won't keep in this climate! A festival, well and truly kept.

Rosemary Bent, New Zealand Companion



Sunday breakfast at Bumbu



Ham, Alan, Smith, Lester, Benjamin, Kingsley and Charles prepare for the dance



Hugh, Father Nick (Italian RC), Paul and Andrew pose uncomfortably

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The Society of St Francis is committed to follow Christ in the way of St Francis of Assisi, in humility, love and joy.

All editorial correspondence should be addressed to:

The Editor, *franciscan*
Hilfield Friary
DORCHESTER
Dorset DT2 7BE
UK

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Community Routes

◆◆ Discerning the future

In the last issue, Brother **Damian**, the Minister Provincial of the Brothers, wrote of the external review team's recommendation that SSF needed to reconsider the scale of its commitments and that this might mean closing some houses. The meeting of Life Professed brothers in June left the task of making choices to the Provincial Chapter which met at Francistide.

It was decided, after much prayer and discussion, that the two houses from which SSF will withdraw are **Belfast** and **Plaistow**. At present, no precise dates have been fixed. This will cause sadness to many, especially for our friends in the neighbour-hood of Deerpark Road and Balaam Street, who have given us so much over the years. However, we hope the difficult decisions can be seen as not just an end but also as an opportunity for the call to new challenges elsewhere. Our time in both Northern Ireland and East London has been richly blessed and we hope to include appreciations of both these houses in future issues of *franciscan*.

◆◆ Visions and dreams

The second **Sisters' Meeting** of 1995, in September, agreed a Vision Statement for the European Province of CSF, and in the light of that vision dreamed how we might be in 10 years, 5 years and 1 year. A great richness of possibilities emerged, and much hope and energy for the future, along with a recognition of the need for some changes. The Francistide Chapter carried that work forward, agreeing to *consider especially Compton Durville* and the best ways of carrying forward in the future the work currently undertaken there. They hope to be in a position to come to a decision at Candlemas. The Chapter also with great sadness agreed to close **CSF's Birmingham** house, and this will take place in the first quarter of 1996.

◆◆ Minister General CSF

Readers of **Cecilia's** Minister's Letter in the last *franciscan* will be aware of her illness. Sadly a further operation in August found inoperable cancer, and she has now resigned as Minister General on the grounds of ill-health. Please continue to hold Sister Cecilia

in your prayers, and remember CSF as they elect her successor.

◆◆ Golden Jubilee

On 4 October, **Michael** celebrated fifty years in Profession at Hilfield, where he celebrated the St Francis Day mass in the same chapel in which he had taken his vows in 1945. A large congregation were there to greet him, as on the following Saturday, when he similarly presided at the Francistide festival at St Bene't's Church in Cambridge. A special lunch was provided, enjoyed by a happy gathering of his friends, members of the Third Order and Companions. For those who did not have a chance to buy Michael's book of memoirs **For the Time Being** when it was published two years ago, the Hilfield Shop now has it available at a special price of £6.00 (£7.50 inc. p&p).

◆◆ Shepherds Law

Brother Harold has discussed his future with the Society of Saint Francis, the Trustees of the Shepherds Law Hermitage, the Bishop of Newcastle and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle. He has explained to them that he feels called to join the Roman Catholic Church. He hopes to continue at Shepherds Law his work of ecumenical reconciliation between Christian people of divided allegiance and he expects to do this in association with the Society of Saint Francis, which will remain responsible for the work of the Hermitage.

◆◆ Advice and Counsel

Damian's election to the Advisory Council on the Relations of Bishops and Religious Communities is a further, but important, addition to his crowded programme. It meets twice a year and is one of the few formal links between Communities and the structures of our Church. The Council was inaugurated in 1935 to:

- 1) advise Bishops on questions arising about the charters and rule of existing Communities, the establishment of new Communities and matters referred to it by a diocesan Bishop;
- 2) advise existing Communities or their Visitors in any matters that they refer to it;
- 3) give guidance to those who wish to form Communities.

Its present Chairman is the Bishop of Newcastle and its membership consists of thirteen members, three nominated by the Bishops and ten elected from the Communities. Elections take place every five years, at the time of the Synod elections. *The Council publishes A Directory of the Religious Life last revised in 1990 and available from Church House Bookshop, £2.75 inc. p&p.*

◆◆ General Synod

Tristram has been elected to serve as a representative for the Religious Communities in the Canterbury Province in the House of Laity on the General Synod for the next five years. He has sat as a member for one year already, having been elected at a by-election. Also representing the Communities will be, in the House of Clergy, Father Aidan Mayoss CR and Sister Teresa CSA and in the House of Laity, Sister Hilary CSMV and Sister Margaret Shirley OHP. Tristram also identified nine Tertiaries, eight elected to represent their dioceses, and one bishop!

◆◆ Solitary Splendour

Patricia Clare writes:

On October 18th I left Compton Durville to come to this tiny cottage in South Wales. I am now busy hunting down the most suitable log-burning stove, redecorating, and completing the furnishing. For the last two days gale force winds and heavy rain have buffeted these old walls, but have not detracted from a peaceful sense of homecoming. The first days were blessed with such a riot of beauty - autumn colour, sunny warmth, acorns under foot, glowing apples on a little tree outside the kitchen window, reminding me that it is 'within this created sacramental God-revealing world that the Church is placed.' And it is here, in this place to which God has so surprisingly brought me, that I shall be exploring my sense of vocation to the hermit life within CSF.

◆◆ Summoned to Windsor

An unexpected phone call took **Peter** to Windsor Castle for four days to discuss 'Leadership, Britain and the next ten years' with about thirty others from all walks of life, including the armed forces, police,

trades' unions, local and central government, the City, business and banking world, and the European Commission.

An unlikely group in which to find a friar, but the Windsor Leadership Trust and its sponsors (British Telecom, Shell and Cable and Wireless) are keen to maintain diversity and incorporate a spiritual aspect. The group discovered an enthusiasm for Britain and its role in the world, and it is hoped that the findings of the group will be published. As Peter says, although he found himself out of his depth in areas of finance, he was pleased to be there to remind people of the demands of the gospel.

◆◆ A Street named . . .

The name of the street where the CSF sisters live in San Francisco has been changed from **Army** to **Cesar Chavez**, to honour a dedicated Mexican-American labour leader from California, who toiled non-violently to stop the exploitation of farm workers. The city took a vote on it and apparently it was a close-run thing: but the sisters are very pleased with the result!

◆◆ Book Launch

Holy Trinity House Paddington sees a rich diversity of functions and in September it drew together a good crowd in the name of the Dutch Resistance Movement during the War. Tertiary Elsa Caspers was launching her new book **To Save A Life***, and spoke about her service in that movement which engaged her from the age of eighteen. General Hackett, who has written a foreword for the book, was present to tell of Elsa's life-saving activities. She also described how she assisted his escape after Arnhem, along with many others.

*Published by Deirdre McDonald, £9.95.

◆◆ Brixton Boom

The "Brixton Extension" mentioned in September's *franciscan* is now in use by **Fay** and **Beverley**, increasing the household to six. All are very grateful to local Third Order members, and other friends of the house, whose generosity made furnishing and equipping the flat much easier than expected.

◆◆ Back to school

Take 1200 secondary school students, add a Franciscan brother, leave to mingle together for two or three months and see what happens. In this way **Desmond Alban** was invited to stimulate reflection at school about the moral and spiritual aspects of life. The main task was to meet informally with the

'secondary modern' students for whom Tonbridge's Hugh Christie College caters. In responding to their agenda, the conversations touched on issues ranging from celibacy to drug abuse. 'Brother Des' was also invited to talk to classes about Franciscan life, and met levels of attentiveness that were rare in his former career as a physics teacher. That background was a help with lessons on science and faith, but there were opportunities to contribute in all sorts of subjects. For the students, a habited figure in the playground was an enjoyable novelty. From another perspective, it was an unusual opportunity to experiment with a new form of mission.

◆◆ Compton changes

Elizabeth writes: Compton is always busy in the summer with a full guest house and sisters away for holidays, camps and other events. Last year, 'unpredictables' and emergencies made for a fraught situation; and the half-sized skeleton staff remaining were very hard-pressed indeed. My physical handicaps and senior citizenship combined to cause me symptoms of exhaustion and stress; so the Minister Provincial has agreed to my moving from Compton. After four and a half years as Guardian, a happy time, it seems right for someone younger to take it on; and I am joining the small group of sisters at Hythe. I am glad to report that I am already almost totally restored to normal health and out of the doctor's hands.

Thanks be to God!

◆◆ Rose at work

After some time as a volunteer, **Rose** is now paid to work in a residential rehabilitation centre in Brixton for people recovering from alcoholism. Most of the residents are homeless prior to admission and she finds it very encouraging to see people who have been marginalised regain their self-respect and dignity. The house is run by Christians - most of whom are from various religious orders - and together with the residents they aim to form a loving and accepting community in which respect for the

individual is of primary importance. Rose is responsible for secretarial duties and also ensures she is available when residents need to talk. She greatly values being part of this project and feels privileged to be alongside people who are striving to reclaim their self worth.

◆◆ Roundup

Kentigern John made his first profession in Edinburgh on 30 November and **Peter Christian** was also professed in first vows in Auckland, New Zealand on 2 December.

Credan has been released from first profession and **Nicholas** and **Dominic Mark** have withdrawn from the noviciate.

Kevin and **Nicholas Bird** were at Alnmouth in the autumn, where they took part in a project on the Meadow Well Estate on Tyneside, led by **Alan Michael**. They moved to Glasshampton in December, along with **Desmond Alban** . . . **Elizabeth** moved to Hythe in late November and **Judith Ann** returned from there to Compton Durville . . . **Malcolm** and **Mark Nicholas** have moved to Glasshampton, the latter as Brother in Charge . . . **Amos** has been appointed Brother in Charge at Barrowfield from 1 January . . . **Jacqueline** moved to Newcastle-under-Lyme in October . . . **Simeon Christopher** has moved to Hilfield . . . **Benedict** expects to move to Penhalonga in Zimbabwe in January, to live alongside the Community of the Divine Compassion.

Roger Alexander is also at Penhalonga, pending Ben's arrival . . . **Colin Wilfred** moves to live in Auckland in the new year, when **Jude** will move to Paddington: the two-year contract at St Katharine's Foundation having come to an end.

Geoffrey has been in hospital in Harare with some chest trouble. He is now slowly recovering . . . **Brian** has had surgery to cope with a bladder problem . . . **Francis** and **Ronald** have had cataract operations.

William Henry and **Douglas John** have gone on leave of absence as have **Angela** and **Kate**.

CSF has two new postulants, **Cordelia Williams** and **Susan Berry** . . . And at Hilfield, **Anthony Preece**, **Robert Smart**, **Leo Varquez**, **Nicholas Worssam** and **Bruce Batstone** were admitted as postulants in September.

Franciscan Discipleship Weekends

*exploring ways of following Christ
through the spirituality of St Francis and St Clare*

Hilfield Friary, 5th to 7th July, 1996

and

Alnmouth Friary, 6th to 8th September, 1996

Contact Sister Christine James CSF, 43 Endymion Road, London SW2 2BU

Though we are many

by Jennifer Wild



"How does being a woman (with an emphasis on body) affect spirituality?" It is hard even to formulate the question, let alone start to answer it. We seem to have here a threefold blend: female-body-spirit, and the question is asked of a woman, who might be supposed to have an insider's view, but who might also be supposed, not unreasonably, to have no great notion of how the other half of the human race manages to distinguish itself.

We have more in common than what separates us, and the fact that heart, lungs and digestive systems rule all our lives inescapably ought not to be totally overlooked. In fact it might be thought unfortunate that this brief glance at the embodied female spirit seems to have to focus on the generative organs. And anyway, can we speak (as I have just done) of the human race? We had better reduce that to the part of it most Franciscan readers belong to, the relatively well-off, western, predominantly white, mainly Christian or post-Christian world.

And yet, at the same time, we recognise increasingly the voices of women in other cultures, other races, religions: we being many are one body. And we have a history too: not only the sometimes overwhelmingly important personal inner story that we mull over in retreat, but the long, aching, human story of persistent faith and lingering cruelty, inflicted and suffered, the tangle of good and ill that is impossible to sort with finality.

There is . . . a strong and strongly-felt need to disentangle ourselves from false notions of what it means to be a woman of faith in the Christian community.

There is, I think, among some women at least, a strong and strongly-felt need to disentangle ourselves from false notions of what it means to be a woman of faith in the Christian community. Some are false notions that we have been taught from childhood, in a religious context, some we find so prevalent in the world around us that it is hard to escape with or without the help of religion. To summarise baldly, women are struggling away from a sense that our bodies, at least between neck and knee, are a source of deep embarrassment.

Our bodies are sacred, we are told: temples of the Holy Spirit. But we also carry in our bodies the message that we are dangerous, that our bodies are as often a curse as a

blessing. It might seem best to take as little notice of them as possible. The postures recommended for public worship in our churches do not help. Crouched in our pews at prayer, we hide ourselves from each other and from God.

**Our bodies are sacred,
we are told:
temples of the Holy Spirit.
But we also carry in our
bodies the message
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as a blessing.**

There can seem to be a sort of holy immobilisation being effected - for both women and men, of course, though it is still easy to find places of worship where almost all the movement is by males. It is not, I believe, altogether fashionable to use the language of 'brands plucked from burning' of the faithful Christian, but lacking that desperate urgency, we also seem to have to do without the reality behind the rhetoric of the 'glorious liberty of the children of God.'

When women gather together to share something of their spiritual search and journey with each other, they usually look for some embodiment of their aspirations. There is a felt need for an involvement of more than the head. We talk and argue, brainstorm, shout and listen, but we also dance, learn and practise simple forms of stress-relieving massage, burn sweet-smelling oils, anoint one another or wash one another's hands. What arises, even if unspoken, is the need to be redeemed from being split, being forced into a place that destroys self-respect, a space where there simply isn't room for all of our selves.

Redemption, healing, flourishing: these are the "wide room" our whole being calls for, for ourselves and for everyone; where women can explore friendship with women (as we equally hope men can learn to do with men) without a sense of this being a stepping aside from the "normal" social expectations.

There are other settings than the specifically religious: a teacher of the Alexander technique and a gifted cranial osteopath have managed to bring home to me that this body is all me, that the rediscovery of "right use" of my body, the slow righting of imbalances and bad physical habits, is a spiritual enterprise. The body that is growing older, on its way towards its dissolution in death, can move grace-fully.

It is difficult, however, to escape, or even get a clear view of, our own cultural milieu, the atmosphere that we all breathe, male and female, in which we grow or fail to grow. Take *The Guardian* newspaper, for instance. In a recent issue, I looked to see in what ways women made it into the news: a woman guilty of a peculiarly violent murder and a woman who admitted that she had lied to get a man imprisoned; Lady Thatcher's expensive birthday party; the suicide of a Japanese earthquake survivor; Diane Modahl's hopes of taking part in the next Olympic Games (the only reference I could find to any woman on the four pages of sports news); a photograph of a woman of Sarajevo holding her Red Cross bowl of spaghetti; an Irish recollection of a liberal education in the sixties: the priest to whom the writer (aged fifteen) made his confession "had actually constructed a quite complex league table of sin exclusively based on the female body"; and in the tabloid section a half-page sickeningly awful Gucci model.

Women are newsworthy when they step out of line (are violent, deceitful, or spectacularly successful), or are in particular trouble (Modahl, the Japanese suicide, the starving woman of Sarajevo), but most of the "real" events concern men, and originate with them. Perhaps this is the weakness of the media. Or is it still the case that as women we "bear in our body the dying of the Lord Jesus" in quite particular female mode, because of our unity in the flesh as in the spirit with the good and the evil that is done and endured in other female bodies, and because of our strong hope that the life also that Jesus exhibited in male form might be manifested in this body of ours?



Jennifer Wild is a joint co-ordinator of Womenspace, a programme for women, co-author of Guard the Chaos, and co-editor of Celebrating Women and Human Rites: Worship Resources for an Age of Change (1995), which will be reviewed in the next edition of franciscan.

Freeing the Body

by Sean
Cathie



I've been putting off writing this piece for weeks; somehow the usual approaches don't feel right. It seems that I might be experiencing the discomfort that Andrew Samuels, the Jungian analyst, was referring to when he said that today men, who have previously studied everything else in the world, are now uncomfortably finding that they themselves are the object of study by others, and especially women.

They, or rather I should say we, have not had time to get used to this novel position. Perhaps this helps explain my discomfort and idleness. I'm not too keen to open myself up to such scrutiny.

As I walk over Hampstead Heath, the blue sky in the autumn afternoon sunshine, jet planes are leaving illegible signatures in the sky. Walking along, I find myself thinking about various things, including some ideas of what I might write. And I'm reminded (why do I always forget this?) that, along with the process of walking goes a freeing within me. I've found this before, that through the walking, problems that have felt quite intractable suddenly meet a solution, without any effort, except that of walking.

In this direct and simple way, I'm reminded of how interconnected mind and body are, and how freeing the body, finding a way of using it with ease or comfortably, effectively frees me up in other ways too. So, as I walk along in the autumn sunshine, a range of

possibilities begin to present themselves. Perhaps I can now sit down and write something. My earliest conscious memory comes to mind. I'm lying in a pram outside, as the sun shines and high overhead comes the lazy hum of an aeroplane . . . I'm lying on my back, feeling happy. There's a good feeling in my tummy and the sunshine and lying here is deeply satisfying. Other memories linked with bodily feelings come. I remember running and running and running, down the hill to home, through the bracken being chased by the others, down the beach to the sea. Often the running is not for anything except for the sheer exhilaration and joy of it. On and on we ran, as hard as we could, until we could do it no more and collapsed exhausted and happy on the ground, enjoying the feeling of this too, as greedily as we had earlier enjoyed the running.

Then other memories come, less happy and less vivid, not clear at all, except somehow

held in my body, in particular movements: playing some ball-games on a workshop, I realise that I stop breathing when I'm under 'attack'. I can feel the involuntary gasp of fear as my stomach is somehow sucked in and is rigidly held, with a practised ease. This is familiar. Soberly, I realise how often I respond like this. I think of animals paralysed with fear and so unable to move, and feel that I know what that is like. I'm shocked at this connection.

I realise that this is uncomfortably like the stance I often adopted in childhood. It became a pattern of non-reaction, of being quiet and undemanding. The grown-ups called it 'being good' and seemed to approve of it. It was what they wanted children to be like, especially on special occasions, visiting elderly relatives. So, insidiously but surely the ideas was planted in my young mind that being good and therefore being approved of and accepted by the grown-ups, who mattered so much, was closely bound up with not doing things, and certainly not with doing those things that just suggested themselves, happily and spontaneously.

Such ideas of being good lead inevitably towards a sense that what is spontaneous and natural is forbidden. Being good becomes not-doing-things - which easily becomes not-living. What is needed, instead, is a way of relating, to our bodies, our children, to the earth and so on, that understands that there is a principle of order already at work. What we need are ways of co-operating with that - then the old repressive ways, based on fear and domination, will no longer be necessary.

Sean Cathie is a priest attached to St James' Piccadilly and a training therapist for the Westminster Pastoral Foundation, working in private practice.

EUROPE

The Friary, **Alnmouth**, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 3NJ (01665) 830213

Saint Francis House, 75 Deerpark Road, **Belfast** BT14 7PW (01232) 351480

Saint Francis House, 113 Gillott Rd, **Birmingham** B16 0ET (0121) 454 8302 fax: (0121) 445 9784

Saint Francis House, 15 Botolph Lane, **Cambridge** CB2 3RD (01223) 353903

Saint Francis Convent, **Compton Durville**, South Petherton, Somerset TA13 5ES (01460) 240473 Fax: (01460) 242360

The Little Portion, 111/2 Lothian Road, **Edinburgh** EH3 9AN (0131) 228 3077

16 Dalserf Street, Barrowfield, **Glasgow** G31 4AS (0141) 550 1202

St Mary-at-the-Cross, **Glasshampton**, Shrawley, Worcester WR6 6TQ (01299) 896345

The Friary, **Hilfield**, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 7BE (01300) 341345; fax: (01300) 341293

43 Endymion Road, **Brixton**, London SW2 2BU phone & fax: (0181) 671 9401

Holy Trinity House, Orsett Terrace, **Paddington**, London W2 6AH (0171) 723 9735

House of the Divine Compassion, 42 Balaam St, **Plaistow**, London E13 8AQ (0171) 476 5189

10 Halcrow Street, **Stepney**, London E1 2EP (0171) 247 6233

Greystones Saint Francis, First Ave, Porthill, **Newcastle-under-Lyme**, Staffs. ST5 8QX (01782) 636839

Postal Addresses

Saint Francis House, Normanby Rd, **Scunthorpe**, North Lincolnshire Phone & fax: (01724) 853899

Saint Mary's Convent, **Freeland**, Witney, Oxfordshire OX8 8AJ Phone: (01993) 881225 Fax: (01993) 882434

The Old Parsonage, **Freeland**, Witney, Oxfordshire OX8 8AQ (01993) 881227

The Minister Provincial TSSF:
The Very Revd Stephen Platten, The Deanery, The Close, Norwich NR1 4EG Phone: (01603) 219483 Fax: (01603) 613309

AMERICA

Little Portion Friary, PO Box 399, Mount Sinai, NY 11766/0399, USA Phone: (516) 473 0553 Fax: (516) 473 9434

St Elizabeth's Friary, 1474 Bushwick Avenue, **Brooklyn**, NY 11207, USA (718) 455 5963

San Damiano, 573 Dolores Street, **San Francisco**, CA 94110, USA (415) 861 1372

Saint Francis House, 3743 Cesar Chavez Street, **San Francisco**, CA 94110, USA Phone: (415) 824 0288; Fax: (415) 826 7569

Poor Clares' Convent, **Maryhill**, Mount Sinai, NY 11766, USA

Minister Provincial TSSF (& Minister General):
Rev. Dr Alden Whitney, 167 Long Ridge Road, Danbury, Connecticut 06810, USA

AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND

St Francis Friary, PO Box 37-014, Parnell, **Auckland** 1, New Zealand (09) 771 292

33 Carlton Gore Rd, Grafton, **Auckland** 1, New Zealand (09) 775 054

Hermitage of St Bernardine, **Stroud**, NSW 2425, Australia (049) 945 372

The Friary, Saint Philip's Rectory, 115 Cornwall St, **Annerley**, Qd 4103, Australia (07) 3391 3915

The Clare Community, Monastery of the BVM, **Stroud**, NSW 2425, Australia (049) 945 503

PACIFIC ISLANDS

St Mary of the Angels Friary, **Haruro**, PO Box 78, Popondetta, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea

Katerada, PO Box 78, Popondetta, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea

Dipoturu, PO Box 78, Popondetta, Oro Province, Papua New Guinea

Douglas House, PO Box 3411, **Lae**, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea

c/o St Francis Church, PO Box 576, **Goroka**, Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea

Patteson House, PO Box 519, **Honiara**, Solomon Islands Honiara 22386

La Verna Friary, **Hautambu**, PO Box 519, Honiara, Solomon Islands

The Friary, PO Box 7, **Auki**, Malaita Province, Solomon Islands

San Damiano Friary, Diocese of Hanuato'o, **Kira Kira**, Makira Ulawa Province, Solomon Islands

Book Reviews

C H Lawrence

The Friars

the impact of the early mendicant movement on Western society

Longman, £11.99 pbk

This book is an historical study of the influence of the mendicant orders on the Europe of the 13th and 14th centuries. It is therefore of interest to anyone in search of the facts about the work of the order which St Francis established in the early years of the 13th century.

One such fact is that his order was one among several, and that while his was always numerically stronger, the Order of Preachers with its high academic demands, its more carefully regulated and structured organisation, and its comparative lack of internal strife was probably a sharper tool in the hands of reforming popes and Catholic monarchs.

Professor Lawrence surveys the origins of the Friars Minor, the Preachers (Dominicans), the Augustinians, the Carmelites, and "Crutched Friars" and other bodies, some of which were suppressed by nervous conciliar decree in 1274. He then gives an account of the friars' work and influence in the infant universities, in the promotion of the crusades, as preachers and confessors in the newly burgeoning urban centres where they made their foundations, and as diplomats and inquisitors.

Their freedom from worldly ties, of property or of marriage, gave them the advantage over the secular masters as students and over the monks as instruments of reform in the church. Of course, they quickly made enemies among the secular clergy whose standing and credibility they undermined - and while it is true to say that their influence and popularity had waned considerably by the time of Chaucer (!), the history of the Western Church, riddled with corruption and confronted with the crisis brought about by the heretical movements, would have been very different but for the friars.

It is an impressive story, compellingly told. How far it represents a realisation of the dreams and aspirations of the little poor man of Assisi, who can say?

Anselm SSF

Brother Ramon SSF

The Heart of Prayer

finding a time, a place and a way to pray

Marshall Pickering, £5.99

'The heart of prayer is the rhythmic beat that pulses through the whole of creation. And that heart beat is the Holy Spirit.' Those last phrases in Ramon's new book express his own personal conviction of the cosmic dimension of life in Christ. Ramon writes, successfully and prayerfully, like a modern desert father. His aim is to encourage any who will wish to follow with him in the life of prayer and to explore the depths. With

disarming celtic aplomb Ramon begins by inviting us to examine his own experience and discovery of the one he came to know as God. He is the God who loves and creates, passions over us in Christ and enflames us with his Spirit. Ramon takes us back to his childhood - 'to the perspective of innocence and wonder, mingled with expectation that often invaded my being when I was alone.' The clarity of this first section of the book is remarkable and I wouldn't be surprised if this has the most impact on his readers.

The greater part of what follows is taken up with various essays under the title *The Practice of Spirituality* - retreats; setting up a worship centre; meditation methods; the Jesus Prayer; icons; pilgrimage; and soul friends.

The conclusion, *Personal Reflections*, contains some well-balanced caveats against enthusiasm, the need for balance and the problems of loss of vision.

As I read these parts of the book, two questions presented themselves to me. One is the essential individualism of hermit life. Notwithstanding Ramon's assertion that the prayer life must not be seen as a substitute for the corporate worship of the church, I found it hard not to see Ramon's diet of prayer suggested for us out in the 'world' as an add-on. I wondered whether what most people today should be seeking is a way of really being hard-wired into the worshipping life of the church. What we call 'prayer' is a real relationship with the Lord. So our 'personal' prayer is continuous, issuing from the company of the friends of Jesus gathered together in worship with him. Secondly, if that is so, how many people would be able with Ramon to affirm the meditation methods of prayer or the Jesus prayer as the way to enter into what is a relationship with the Lord?

Are there not simpler ways? Perhaps the New Testament writers were just simply and deeply in love with the Lord who is alive - Jesus - the way to the Father in the grace of the Spirit?

Aelred

Ewell Monastery, West Malling, Kent

Esther de Waal

A Life-Giving Way

A Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict

Geoffrey Chapman

Esther de Waal's commentary on the Rule of Benedict represents the fruit of years of reflection on one of the seminal documents of Western Christianity. It bears the hallmark of good scholarship and is enriched by the wide spectrum of Benedictine monasticism with which she has come into contact in her international travels. What is particularly impressive is the way in which, although she has never lived under the Rule as a nun, she has entirely imbibed its spirit, and can communicate its teaching and wisdom in language and concepts which will make it accessible to a wide public.

For Esther de Waal, if Benedict's spirituality were to be reduced to a single

concept it would be "that of listening to the voice of God in my life" (p 45). She traces echoes of the opening word of the Rule 'Listen' throughout its pages. For example, obedience is about "listening with the ear of the heart" (p 42), a process which opens us up to becoming receptive; calling the brethren to council is not about the assembly of human opinion, but about learning to listen and discern the voice of God in community.

Her commentary on chapter seven of the Rule (pp 47-61), customarily entitled 'On Humility' is particularly good. She does not romanticise Benedict - often a pitfall for lay commentators who are happy to celebrate the balance and moderation of Benedict, but ignore his passion and call for self-discipline. In this context, her discussion of Benedict's view of private ownership (p 110), and exposition of his theology of work (pp 141-5) are noteworthy.

I have only one criticism of this book: it is not very 'user-friendly'. The text of the Rule reproduced in the commentary is that prepared by the Abbey of St John's Collegeville, USA (RB 1980), now the standard modern English translation. The traditional chapter headings have been omitted, presumably to encourage the reader to approach the text with fresh eyes. But this omission, combined with there being no index, makes cross-referring difficult, and may handicap those readers unfamiliar with the Rule. This said, it is a small criticism which must not be allowed to detract from what is an excellent piece of work. Reading it underscores the truth of the claim that the charism of Benedict is one that speaks as much to the Church of today as to that of the sixth century, and moreover to women and men beyond the cloister as well as within it.

Robert Atwell OSB

Burford Priory.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Maria von Wedemeier

Love Letters from cell 92

Harper Collins, £19.99

This edition of the correspondence between Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his fiancée Maria von Wedemeier during 1943 and 1944, is an important contribution to the understanding of Bonhoeffer, elucidating his innermost thoughts to the reader and giving the chronological and biographical background necessary to follow the development of his theology. Hitherto, we knew letters from those years written to friends and contemporaries and published many years ago. Although many of his thoughts only remain fragments in those letters, one cannot avoid the clarity and also the consequences of his thinking, which always asks for ethical responsibility for the existence as a Christian in the world.

But now in these "love letters" the whole intensity and the pain of his feelings affects us so directly as we have never encountered it elsewhere in his correspondence. Following also Maria's own words, for the

first time we can form an idea how really important this very special relationship was for both of them. A short time after their engagement, Dietrich writes to his parents about the time of being separated and unfulfilled yearning for each other: "I'm grateful for the certainty that these very months will prove of immense value to our marriage."

It is indeed emotional in a very special way, being so close to both of them in reading their letters, being moved by their happiness, their dreams about the future, and also their fears for each other - the reader knows from the beginning that, in the end, all hopes were in vain. I have to confess that when I started reading this book, I did so after much hesitation and with great awe. There is a certain intimacy between people which has to be respected. Authenticity does not go together with publicity, especially in a situation where you have the feeling that people are so close to you. Therefore the reader has to take his time, to think behind the written words. He has to take his time to follow the ways their thoughts are going. Maria herself called for respect for this indivisible intimacy, writing to Dietrich on 13 May 1943 consenting to their engagement: "I would rather disown every word that demands to be said on the subject, because it makes things that were better conveyed quietly sound so crude and clumsy."

Two persons - characterised by so different ages and histories of life as by so different personalities - they find each other and work out the way towards a life together. Again, it is Maria who confides to her diary on 19 December 1942: "He's old and wise for his age - a thorough academic. How will I, with my love of dancing, riding, sport, pleasure, be able to forgo all those things?" Always again you will find in Dietrich's letters to his fiancée that there are thoughts touched on which will later be expanded in 1944 as the framework of a theology, absolutely liberated for taking responsibility for the world in this life; and yet in the so-completely unconcerned independence of the young woman, she will become more and more discernible as his partner, retaining her independence and autonomy even in all her effusive love to him.

A collection of letters, part of contemporary history, the story of a love which never was allowed to be fulfilled: not a book just to read through but one in which the intensity of its documents will make you forget that you are only a 'reader'. It is a book I cannot read without again and again thinking about myself!

*Revd Hartmut Fehse
Pastor of the German Lutheran Church
in Cambridge and East Anglia*

*Oscar Cullmann
Prayer in the New Testament
SCM Press, £9.95*

For the Christian of today confronted by a welter of schools and types of prayer, of

conferences and books, of methods and spiritualities - it is at once reassuring and refreshing to find an author who combines a lifetime of biblical scholarship with a passion for the practice of prayer as essential to the life of a disciple of Christ. He offers us here the book which he planned and began "a long time ago" and regards as a contribution to the cause of Christian unity for which shared prayer is indispensable, and 'for a long time has been a bond which has held Christians together.'

Part One examines difficulties about prayer, and fundamental objections to prayer. Part Two is a study of prayer in the New Testament, the main emphases being on the Synoptic Gospels (with an extended section on the Lord's Prayer), the Pauline corpus, and the Gospel and Letters of John. Other New Testament writers are treated more briefly. In Part Three we find New Testament answers to today's questions.

For those whose spiritual education included the idea that prayer is so much more than just 'asking for things', it is easy to lose sight of the priority which the NT accords to petitionary prayer. For Jesus, Paul, John and the others it is far from being a childish exercise for the immature, and occupies a central place in the whole enterprise. God's loving intentions accord to our prayers a part to play in the struggle against evil. 'All individual and collective prayers for peace belong here. This is the supreme nobility of this human activity, in which with the help of the Holy Spirit we go beyond all other human language.'

Professor Cullmann invites us to accompany him in the search for the teaching of the New Testament on prayer. For those who accept his invitation there waits hard work and serious study, and the reward of knowing that our practice of prayer does indeed have its roots and origins

in the life and teaching of Jesus as expounded in scripture.

Anselm SSF

*Rob Marshall
Pilgrim in the Holy Land
A journey with Dame Thora Hird
DLT, £8.95*

Many guide books have been written in recent times to help pilgrims discover the spiritual treasures of the land of Jesus, but this book is different. It has been produced by one who has visited Israel many times over a period of years but who writes about a very special tour of the land which he undertook with the actress Thora Hird. She herself contributes to the book, giving her own reflections, together with the scripture readings and the hymns and prayers which were offered at various points of the pilgrimage.

The book is cast in a popular format. There are some beautiful photographs and also some very clear maps which are not complicated with unnecessary detail. Most of the twenty-four chapters begin with cartoon drawings, which are characteristic of Thora Hird's own sense of humour.

The historical and topical information about the holy places is necessarily somewhat scanty, and tourists will certainly need to take more detailed books with them if they are to get the most out of their visits. But this book will provide a great deal of light reading and devotional material which will do much to enhance a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Martin SSF

*Spiritual Classics from the Early Church
Compiled and introduced
by Robert Atwell OSB
National Society / CHP £9.95*

In his introduction to this anthology, Dom Robert draws attention to the fact that classical Anglicanism has always appealed not simply to scripture but also to the witness of the undivided church of the first Christian centuries. He notes, however, that the current reality "is that most Anglicans, doubtless like many Christians in other traditions, have only a minimal knowledge of the Fathers."

Reading this book would benefit anyone who was aware of their lack of knowledge of the Fathers. The compiler has drawn upon the riches of patristic writing to give us much that should enrich our prayer and inform our minds. Many of the great names of the early church are represented. One can read what Cyprian felt about the Lord's Prayer, some of the pithy sayings of the desert fathers, Gregory of Nyssa on Moses, some of the homilies of John Chrysostom, as well as much from Augustine.

An introduction to each chapter gives a helpful insight into the life and times of the individual writers. As well as providing a general bibliography, one is given another at the end of each chapter, so that if, for example, one wishes to read more of Gregory of Nyssa or more about him, that information is available.

This is a good book for thinking and praying Christians. Those categories should cover all of us!

Dominic Christopher SSF

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Brother Cecil SSF, RIP

After a long illness, Brother Cecil died in the evening of 9 October 1995, in his eighty-third year of life and in the fifty-first year of his religious profession. His funeral mass was held at Alnmouth Friary on 14 October. His ashes were interred at Hilfield Friary on Saturday 18 November, with many brothers and sisters present. At the requiem mass preceding the interment, Brother Damian, the Minister Provincial, preached the sermon, printed below.

On that day, when the evening had come, Jesus said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." (Mark 4.35)

As we have just heard, this gospel verse announces a scene where Jesus and his disciples are caught in one of those sudden, violent storms that came and went on Lake Galilee. It connected in my mind because sudden little storms would arise for Cecil, and then some calming influence would be brought to bear, just as Jesus spoke to the storm, "Hush, be still."

The youthful years of Cecil Harrison Crickmay had been dogged by what he described as fainting fits after one particularly heavy fall at school, when his poor head suffered bad concussion. In his early twenties, he tried several employments, but when the War broke out in 1939, he applied as a conscientious objector to go and help SSF and Father Charles in Peckham. This led to his coming down to Hilfield on Ascension Day in 1941, where Father Algy admitted him as one of his famous Oblates. Joining the First Order of SSF in 1942, he was sacristan in this chapel for ten years. From early correspondence, I was reminded that at Hilfield he fell once again, suffering a fractured and dislocated shoulder. I don't think he ever quite recovered his love for Hilfield after that!

Cecil went on to join the brothers in Cambridge, where he began a lifetime's ministry among children, which he combined with many a household chore. He lived at the house in Lady Margaret Road for seventeen years.

Most of us who know and loved Cecil think of him at Alnmouth, where he also lived for a total of seventeen years, split by a period in between at Liverpool stretching over another

decade. Altogether, he served SSF in one capacity or another for fifty-five years.

The most well-known fact about Cecil is that he was not a monk! If he had a pet aversion (the others are less mentionable) it was the atmosphere of a monastery. A brother, yes, but never cloistered. Even SSF was an uncomfortable identity for him if he felt we imposed anything that smacked of rituals, routines or regularity.

And yet, in reality, Cecil was a creature of habit. The rhythm of prayer, study and work suited his temperament. At every free opportunity, his head would dive into a book, preferably a history book or a biography. He also adored Tolkien and Lewis and McDonald, half living in the company of a hobbit or the royal children of Aslan, taking up sword against the 'orrible orcs' or the white witch of Narnia.

He revelled so passionately in that other world of fantasy and in the past world of history, with their monumental battlefields, that we may question whether he was a pacifist at all! But Brother Edward turned this to advantage, discovering that the best way of getting round Cecil was to respectfully address him as the Duke of Marlborough, claiming the authority of Prince Eugene for himself. That always worked a treat.

However strong his resistance to the Religious Life, we may give thanks today for the life of a brother who truly witnessed to the gospel of peace and to the vocation of a friar with clarity and strong principles. I speak of his communion - with creation, with a host of people, with God. As our First Order Principles direct, he followed the Son of Man 'who came eating and drinking, who loved the birds and flowers, who blessed little children, who was the friend of publicans and sinners, who sat at the tables alike of the rich and the poor.' He gave years and years of loving care to Barndale House, Alnmouth, a special school for children with severe disabilities; and also to those other children whom he befriended into adulthood, for he leaves behind many lady friends who know of his courteous charm. He was like an uncle to a multitude of people whose friendship he courted.

Cecil loved the North Sea in its varying moods, and he would study it in his latter days at Alnmouth, when arthritis bit into his freedom of movement. During his two final years, where he was wonderfully cared for by adoring nurses at Ravensmount Residential Care Home in Alnmouth, he wrote a greeting to his friends where he described

'baskets of nuts hanging from the eaves for the birds who are feeding well: finches, bluetits, sparrows, the odd thrush.' Yes, even a sparrow falling to the ground would not miss Cecil's gentle concern. His knowledge of wildlife was extensive, his reverence for creation was a basis for his pacifism.

But my greatest debt to Brother Cecil is around the life of the chapel. Not only was he punctual and recollected, not only did he read the scriptures with deep meaning and pleasure, but I was privileged over the years, when I too lived in the North East, to discover him sitting there in his seat in chapel, as the dawn of each new day broke over Alnmouth Bay, long before the sounding of the bell for mattins. There he would be, in stillness and quiet, engaged in acts of prayerfulness that also drew me into the friendship of God; while the martins, on the other side of the plate glass window, danced their own praise as they weaved in and out of the sandstone arches.

No, Cecil was no monk. Cecil was a friar who carried the pain of a bruised and beleaguered life until, like Francis, it became integrated with so much of God's creation, with God's people and indeed with God himself.

So, thank you, Father, for that ninth day of October, in the octave of the blessed Francis, at 9.00 p.m., when the even was come, when Jesus said to Cecil, "Let us cross over to the other side." Peace. Be still. And may he rise in glory.

Amen!

